

# ADVENTURES

IN WESTERN NEW YORK HISTORY



## Grover Cleveland and Buffalo

FRANCIS J. WALTER



BUFFALO AND ERIE COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

---

VOLUME XI



*Grover Cleveland, Mayor of Buffalo, 1882.*

★   ★   ★   ★   ★

## GROVER CLEVELAND AND BUFFALO

By Francis J. Walter

**S**CANDALOUS bribe-taking and dishonesty among politicians were common at all levels of American government during the years following the Civil War. Individuals within both the Republican and Democratic parties joined together to keep themselves in power, to control elections, and to arrange government contracts so that they personally benefitted, regardless of how much this cost the citizens in taxes. Such combinations of powerful men, called political rings, were managed by "bosses," and supported by contractors, businessmen, and others who wanted favors. They were so well established in power that many citizens felt nothing could be done to correct the evils of their influence. A great number of people had become so discouraged about the state of politics that they failed even to vote. In fact, they often felt that a vote meant very little, for all of the candidates seemed equally dishonest.

To arouse such citizens and to enlist their backing in a reform movement was a tremendous task. Few men were willing to put forth the effort required for a reform to be successful. However, the discontent that was rising was enough to challenge a few courageous men to lead the struggle for honest politics. One of the greatest of these was Grover Cleveland. It was the dissatisfaction of the citizenry of Buffalo with the scandals among law-makers that lifted Cleveland from his quiet law office to the position of Mayor of Buffalo in 1882, of Governor of New York State in 1883 and of President of the United States two years later.

Cleveland's struggle for better government began in Buffalo. His early training and education had prepared him well for the job he undertook in improving the city's political life. He was born on March 18, 1837, in a small, overcrowded house in Caldwell, New Jersey. His father, the Reverend Richard Falley Cleveland, named the baby Stephen Grover in honor of the former minister who had served Caldwell's Presbyterian Church for fifty years. Young Grover — he soon dropped the name Stephen — had numerous brothers and sisters, a devout, kindly, and studious father, and a strict Puritan ancestry.

There was a strain of stubbornness in Cleveland, and a sense of the value of hard work, honesty, self-respect, education, and religious training, that can be traced through the family to the first Cleveland to come to America. This ancestor, Moses Cleveland, arrived in Massachusetts from England in 1635. He was the forebear of many men who became prominent in the business and church life of the new world. Grover's mother was Ann Neal, of Irish and German-Quaker origin. Her family had been driven from Ireland for political activity and had settled in

Baltimore. Ann was the daughter of a rather well-off bookseller and publisher.

Grover's family, however, was not well-off. At Caldwell his father's salary never reached \$600 a year and there were many mouths to feed. In 1841, Richard Cleveland accepted a call to Fayetteville, a village of central New York. This is the place that young Grover always remembered fondly as home. He began his formal schooling at Fayetteville and went on to the small village academy. During these years the Cleveland children were growing up in a family which placed considerable emphasis on religious training. With his sisters and brothers Grover studied the Bible and recited his catechism lessons.

In 1850 the Clevlands moved to Clinton where the eldest son, William, was attending Hamilton College. Grover registered at the town academy where he studied with determination, although not with brilliance. That autumn, Cleveland first saw Buffalo, when he arrived after a slow boat trip on the Erie Canal to visit his uncle, Lewis F. Allen, at Black Rock. According to a letter he wrote to his sister Mary, he enjoyed himself a great deal with his cousins and found the journey full of adventure.

In the spring of 1852 Grover went back to Fayetteville to work, in order to add to his father's very small income. He was given a job as clerk in the general store for \$50 for the first year and board and room. He said in later years that he learned business lessons of enduring value in this humble post. Required to rise at five in summer and half-past five in winter, he swept out the store, built the fire, ran errands, waited on customers, and performed odd jobs until store-closing time. He returned home in March to study in the hope of entering Hamilton College that fall.

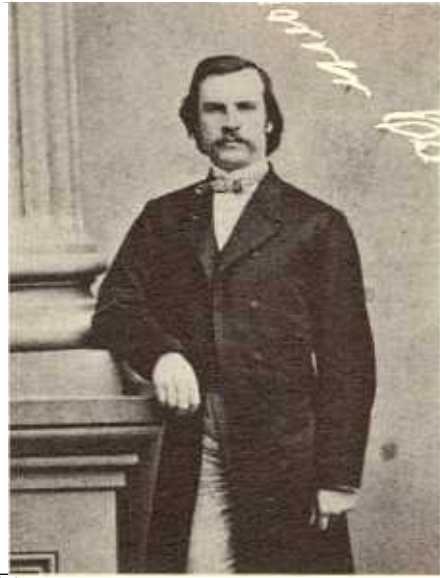
In 1853 Grover Cleveland's father accepted a call to a church in Holland Patent, New York. Shortly after the family's arrival there, Mr. Cleveland died, leaving Mrs. Cleveland with a family of ten and little money. Under these circumstances Grover decided he could not attend Hamilton but must seek employment.

For a year Grover worked with his brother William teaching in a school for the blind in New York City. He then returned to Holland Patent and, not finding employment there, decided to do what so many young men of his day were doing: to seek his fortune by moving West. Grover felt attracted to Cleveland, Ohio, a growing city and one which had been named after a relative, Moses Cleveland. However, he never reached Ohio. Upon arriving in Buffalo on May 12, 1855, he was offered temporary work by his uncle, Lewis F. Allen.

Allen was an influential resident of Black Rock, living two miles from the city of Buffalo in a large, comfortable home situated on broad acres between Niagara Street and the river. He offered his nephew room, board, and fifty dollars for five months' labor on the *Shorthorn Herd Book*, a publication for cattlemen which he issued each year. Although

the wealthy Republican, Allen, had little direct influence on Cleveland in later years, Grover's stay at his uncle's home had a maturing effect on the young man. Here, Grover came to appreciate something of the wide world of business and politics through the large body of stockmen, farmers, businessmen, scholars, and politicians who were guests at the Allen residence. Cleveland decided that his future lay in Western New York and that he could achieve success if he became a lawyer.

His uncle secured him a position with the Buffalo law firm of Henry W. Rogers, Dennis Bowen, and Sherman S. Rogers. Cleveland served as an office clerk and in his spare time studied law. It is said that when



*Grover Cleveland about 1864.*

young Cleveland first reported for work, the elder Rogers threw a copy of Blackstone's famous law textbook on the new clerk's desk and announced: "That's where they all begin." With little more help than this, he was left to learn the law.

In May 1859, after three and a half years with Rogers, Bowen and Rogers, Cleveland was admitted to the bar by the Supreme Court. He was now qualified to practice law. Instead of opening his own firm, Cleveland decided to remain with his old associates as their chief clerk.

Meanwhile, Cleveland joined the Democratic party, and gave some of his time to party work, serving as a volunteer ward worker, and helping to get the voters out to the polls each fall. In 1862 he won his first political campaign: he was elected a supervisor for the Second Ward where most of the people were of German descent. Although traditionally Republican, these Germans liked Cleveland personally and gave him strong support throughout his political career.

A short time later he accepted the position of assistant district attorney. This office offered little by way of salary but gave him a fine opportunity to become better known in public life. Since the district attorney was in delicate health, most of the hard work was performed for several years by Cleveland.

More than once Cleveland's mind must have wandered to the horrible Civil War in which his country was engaged. As more and more men were needed to fight in the Union armies, the North passed a draft law. Cleveland was selected to serve, but he decided to furnish a substitute as was permitted under the law. Two of his brothers were Union officers and Cleveland was the chief support of his mother and



*Grover Cleveland, Sportsman.*

sisters. The man Cleveland hired, a young Buffalonian of Polish origin, served with a New York regiment and was later transferred to hospital duty in Washington.

Toward the end of the Civil War Cleveland tried once more to be elected supervisor of the Second Ward. However, at this time, the voters of Buffalo, including many of Cleveland's personal supporters, voted heavily in favor of Lincoln and his Republican party. Defeated for this office of supervisor, Cleveland then ran unsuccessfully for district attorney. Following his second defeat Cleveland withdrew from politics.

These years Cleveland devoted to his law practice. He formed several partnerships with such prominent Buffalonians as Oscar Folsom, Lyman K. Bass, and Wilson S. Bissell. Folsom was a particularly close friend, a gay, brilliant sportsman whose light-heartedness contrasted with Cleveland's increasing seriousness. His sudden and tragic death in 1875 was a great loss to Grover Cleveland, who then undertook the care of Folsom's estate. For the rest of his life Cleveland continued to concern himself with the welfare of Folsom's widow and young daughter, Frances.

While Cleveland was not a particularly brilliant attorney, there were few who could excel him in hard work. His associate, Bissell, recalled that Cleveland "... was generally the first one in the office in the morning and the last one out of it at night, and all the hours of these long days were devoted with patience and zeal to the work he found before him."

Not every day was a working day, however. Cleveland found ample opportunity to follow his favorite sports, hunting and fishing. He was happiest in the marshes or on the shores of Grand Island with his gun or fishing rod, or in a hotel eating a well-cooked, German-type meal served with beer. Still a bachelor, he was particularly fond of spending long hours with his male friends eating, drinking, and singing such songs as "There's a Hole at the Bottom of the Sea," in Louis Goetz's *The Dutchman's* or some other local restaurant.

Cleveland was elected Sheriff of Erie County in 1870. His administration of this office gave some indication of the reform spirit that marked his later years in public service. Maintaining law and order within the county was no easy task. The lake and canal port of Buffalo had quite a high crime rate, grafters who gave and received bribes were active in making illegal profits from their contracts even with the county jail. For a share in the profits, previous officials had allowed



*Cleveland's Law office, 1881, on second floor, Weed Block.*

such vice to grow unchecked. Cleveland attacked it. He kept his deputy sheriffs under close supervision for he felt that the people had every right to expect the full performance of duty by those paid with public funds. As sheriff, too, it was Cleveland's unhappy task to hang two convicted murderers.

No doubt the people of Buffalo took note of the upright and honest manner in which Grover Cleveland served them, first as assistant district attorney and later as sheriff. Although Cleveland probably never considered himself as a likely candidate for Buffalo's highest executive post, the times were ripe for the election of a man of Cleveland's reputation.

In 1881 Buffalo was celebrating the forty-ninth anniversary of its incorporation as a city. From the small frontier hamlet which the British had burned in late December 1813, Buffalo had rapidly developed, first into a village and then into a city. Many factors contributed to its rapid growth: it was the western end of the Erie Canal and had a harbor at the head of lake navigation. The city became a famous shipping center. Its excellent location assisted in making it a center for eastern railroads. Various industries were established in Buffalo because of the ease with which raw materials could be transported to the city and finished goods sent out.

To construct the city's transportation facilities and to work in its factories, shops, and stores, many Irish and German immigrants had come to Buffalo. These newer Americans joined with the older New England settlers to create a busy, hard-working community of many nationalities. It was a vigorous, lively city of iron works, brass foundries, leather and clothing manufacturing plants, and some of the largest breweries in America. Long settled families and the more newly-arrived immigrant groups contributed to the city's cultural life.

By 1881, a public school system, including a high school, had long been established. Daily and weekly newspapers, some in the German language, were published. Literary societies and singing clubs met regularly, and the day was not far away when a public library would replace

that of the Young Men's Association. Theaters, hospitals, a university, a police and a fire department, churches of various denominations, all showed the efforts of Buffalonians to make life in the city of their choice comfortable, secure, and satisfying. However, in the field of government Buffalo, like many another American city, had fallen victim to corruption.

During the 1870's the city's government passed into the hands of a political ring. Since both Republicans and Democrats were members of this group, it mattered little which party was in power. However, since the Republican party usually occupied most of the city offices, much of the contempt for politicians and indignation against dishonest politics was heaped upon that party. By 1880 the corruption within the city government had become particularly pronounced. Taxes were high. The cost of supporting public services such as the police and the fire department was increasing steadily. At the same time there seemed to be no improvement in the services rendered by these departments. Graft was suspected by conscientious citizens who began to search for someone who would reform Buffalo's city government.

As the time for nominating individuals for city offices in the 1881 election approached, more and more people began to demand candidates who would not serve as mere tools of the corrupt ring. There was open talk of men deserting their parties to support those candidates of either major party who would promise an honest administration.

On October 19, 1881, the Republican city convention nominated for mayor Milton C. Beebe, president of the Common Council. He was a well-known member of the ring. This was the signal for many Republicans to rebel against their party for having selected so unworthy a candidate. With the Republicans split, the Democratic party had a valuable opportunity to be successful in the approaching election. If they chose a reform candidate, they could count on the votes of rebellious Republicans to support them.

The delegates to the Democratic city convention were to gather at Tivoli Hall on Tuesday afternoon, October 25. A committee of five had been chosen to search for a suitable Democratic candidate for mayor. Several prominent citizens had declined this committee's invitation to be a candidate.

Rather disheartened at these refusals, the selection committee met at Bill Dranger's popular restaurant, located at Eagle and Pearl Streets, on the Saturday before the convention. When Cleveland happened to drop into the restaurant and joined in the group's discussion, someone suggested that Cleveland himself run. Cleveland at first would hear nothing of this suggestion but finally agreed to accept the nomination if the rest of the ticket met with his approval. In formally accepting the nomination for the office of mayor at Tivoli Hall, Cleveland briefly addressed the convention, saying in part:

... and hoping that I may be of use to you in your efforts to

inaugurate a better rule in municipal affairs, I accept the nomination tendered me.

There is, or there should be, no reason why the affairs of our city should not be managed with the same care and the same economy as private interests. And when we consider that public officials are the trustees of the people, and hold their place and exercise their powers for the benefit of the people, there should be no higher inducement to a faithful and honest discharge of a public duty.

Cleveland's formal letter of acceptance contained this same idea that public officials are trustees of the people. While Cleveland was not the originator of the phrase, "Public office is a public trust," the slogan was the theme of his platform during the campaign of 1881.

The election campaign was brief, lasting but two weeks. The city's newspapers played a major role in the campaign. A Democratic paper, the *Buffalo Courier*, quoted Cleveland as saying, "I believe a democratic thief is as bad as a republican thief," and promised that "... city hall will get a needed ventilation when he takes his seat in the mayor's chair." The *Buffalo Express*, representing the viewpoint of independent Republicans, felt that if Cleveland were to be elected Buffalo's mayor "... the City will be to him as his client ... and woe would be to the man that should attempt to rob or otherwise wrong her!" The *Commercial Advertiser*, a Republican paper, strongly supported Milton E. Beebe.

While the battle of the newspapers raged, Cleveland went about the city making speeches. He offered no specific program for municipal affairs, but emphasized again and again the necessity for honest and efficient government. In one speech he remarked: "It is a good thing for the people now and then to rise up and let the office holders know that they are responsible to the masses."

As the campaign drew to a close, Beebe's supporters reminded the voters of their candidate's experience in municipal affairs. But the citizens had had their fill of machine politics and the misrule of "experienced" rings. They had little desire to support a candidate so closely connected with the Buffalo ring. So, on a mild election day, November 8, 1881, the people gave Cleveland 15,120 votes against 11,528 for Beebe. When it became known that the ring leaders had given up the contest, supporters of Cleveland joyfully filed through the city streets. Bonfires were lit and a band serenaded the offices of the *Buffalo Express* and the *Buffalo Courier*.

As mayor-elect, Cleveland had less than two months to prepare for his new position. He would need the full support of those who had placed their trust in him as a reform candidate. The brief but stormy election campaign was one indication of what Cleveland might expect from those established politicians who did not want to see the restoration of good government in the city of Buffalo.

Grover Cleveland began his administration as Buffalo's mayor on

January 1, 1882. The habit of hard work which he had developed as a lawyer he now applied to his new position. As a reformer he refused approval to measures passed by the Common Council in which he saw a waste of the taxpayer's money. He vetoed actions in which he felt members of the ring were trying to swindle the public. Frequently he sent messages to the Common Council, emphasizing principles of morality and ordinary common sense.

Unfortunately the election of a reform mayor did not mean that ring control had vanished from the city. On the contrary, the corrupt group still had its influential members in the Common Council. With that legislative body Cleveland had to fight some of his greatest battles for right and justice. Cleveland relied heavily on the few men in the Council who had backed his reforms. To a divided Council, then, Cleveland sent his first message, the keynote of his reform administration.

The new mayor emphasized the idea which governed his entire political career: office holders are the "trustees and agents" of their fellow-citizens, "holding their funds in sacred trust, to be expended for their benefit." In his message Cleveland attacked the Streets Department, where, he felt, mismanagement had led to the wasting of public funds. He gave details on precisely how he believed the people's money had been wasted. Ring members moved that further reading be discontinued. This maneuver was ruled illegal and the reading of the message went on, much to their embarrassment.

Cleveland expressed disgust with the condition of the streets. This was an issue which would thoroughly arouse every Buffalonian within the next few months. He brought before the Common Council a proposal to eliminate the unhealthy Hamburg Canal. Cleveland also recommended that the newspaper which would offer the lowest bid for public printing be chosen as the official city paper. Previously, printers supporting the ring had gotten the contracts, regardless of the price they asked. The mayor also informed city employees that he could see no reason for early closing of municipal offices. The message ended with a hint to the city auditor that his job consisted of more than the mere checking of account books. Thus began Cleveland's administration. To assist him in his reform program, the mayor had the support of some members of the Common Council and of the city's newspapers, and the trust of the people, the vast majority of whom desired good government. Moreover, Cleveland held a powerful weapon in the executive veto. He could disapprove measures passed by the Council. This weapon he would use frequently in his battle for reform.

While a number of Cleveland's vetoes were quite spectacular and designed to upset the plans of the ring, others were ordinary and routine. Typical of the latter type of veto was the communication which Mayor Cleveland sent to the Common Council on January 9, 1882. In this, his first veto, Cleveland refused to agree to the part of a reso-

lution relating to the salary of the newly appointed Keeper of the City Morgue. It established a salary, but it failed to define the duties and responsibilities of a morgue keeper.

Before January had passed Cleveland also vetoed an established payment for publishing a summary of the Common Council's proceedings in one of the city's German papers. He felt that editors would prepare summaries of their own as a service to their readers and the taxpayer could be saved the cost of having official summaries printed.

On several occasions Cleveland refused to honor the Council-approved applications of city employees for special compensation for various kinds of work. Vague resolutions of the City Council approving the construction of sidewalks also met with vetoes by Cleveland. Many of these resolutions offered opportunity for swindles. The type of material to be used was not specified nor were the precise dimensions of the sidewalks indicated.

Not every communication between the mayor and the Common Council was a signal for disagreement. For example, the Council did not hesitate to act on Cleveland's report that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was alarmed at the number of small children found on Buffalo streets at late hours of the night. The mayor fearful that the children would become delinquents, recommended that action be taken by the city attorney through the Common Council.

Cleveland also clashed with the Council on the question of pure drinking water in a certain district. He stated to the members that "... if there is in the mind of anyone the idea that it is not necessary to supply the poor and laboring people in the vicinity of this well with water as pure and healthful as that furnished to their richer and more pretentious fellow-citizens, I desire to say that I have no sympathy with such a notion." Cleveland also supported the work of the Board of Health in condemning unsanitary barns where cows were improperly fed and their milk contaminated.

On July 3, 1882, the semi-centennial of the founding of the City of Buffalo was observed. The city's chief executive took this occasion to call upon the citizenry to rededicate themselves to the cause of good



*Grover Cleveland Statue  
outside Buffalo City Hall.*

government. With his unfailing honesty and sense of obligation to follow the dictates of his own conscience, Cleveland observed completely the rules of good government he set down for his fellow-citizens.

The two most spectacular and, indeed, the most significant events of the Cleveland administration were the Hamburg Canal episode and the exposure of the street-cleaning scandal. The first endeared Cleveland to the people of Buffalo. The second climaxed his reform administration and proved to be one of the reasons why Grover Cleveland was nominated for the governorship of New York State.

The problem of sewage disposal had troubled the people of Buffalo for years. Since the city sloped to the lake, its sewage might have been easily disposed of had not a part of the Erie Canal — the Main and Hamburg Street Canal — intercepted the natural flow of drainage. Sewage collected along the banks of the canal and created a most unhealthful condition. Numerous schemes for solving this sewage problem had been suggested from time to time. For a short time a water wheel had been installed in the canal which pushed the sewage up the canal toward Tonawanda and Lockport. This had to be discontinued because of the protests of the residents of those communities.

By the time Cleveland became mayor of Buffalo, the sewage problem had reached a critical state. Citizens demanded action and health authorities warned of dreadful consequences if something were not done about the "foul ditch." Shortly after his inauguration as mayor, Cleveland suggested that a commission of citizens be appointed to undertake the construction of a large intercepting sewer which would carry the city's sewage under the canal and into the river. Most of Buffalo's newspapers approved the mayor's idea as did the public in general.

Opposition to the plan arose, however. Some individuals saw a chance for personal gain in the construction of a sewer. They realized that in an independent citizens' commission there was no chance for personal profit. They proposed that an alternate bill be introduced in Albany which would give the Council and city engineer control over the sewer construction. After much sparring between Cleveland and the Council as to which bill would be presented, the Council passed a resolution directing the city attorney to travel to Albany to press for the passage of their bill.

As expected, Cleveland vetoed the Council's sewer bill, and the resolution to send the city attorney to Albany. In the state capital Senator Titus of Buffalo introduced a revised sewer bill which supported Cleveland's recommendations. This last bill was passed in June. Cleveland promptly nominated five outstanding Buffalonians to serve on the new Board of Commissioners of Sewers of the City of Buffalo. Again the Council sought "a finger in the pie." It rejected all five nominations. Cleveland, however, would not be defeated. He informed the Council of the "character and standing" of the nominees and of "their entire

freedom from any inclinations to enrich contractors at the expense of the people." Reminding the Council that it would not want to be charged with further delay and the loss of valuable time, Cleveland again submitted the names of the same five nominees. Public opinion forced the Council to confirm their appointments.

The fight for a non-political, civic-minded Board of Sewer Commissioners was over. Cleveland had emerged the victor in another battle for safeguarding the interests of the people.

Just as the sewer struggle was ending, Cleveland entered into another battle with the corrupt members of the Common Council. He vetoed a Council resolution awarding a street-cleaning contract to George Talbot, a contract called by Allan Nevins in *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, "an unblushing attempt to rob the city of approximately \$200,000." Talbot had raised his original bid by \$50,000 and there was a strong suspicion that at least some of this sum would find its way into the pockets of aldermen who supported his bid.

Cleveland gave his reasons for the veto in a message to the Council. He wrote: "This is a time for plain speech, and my objection to the action of your honorable body, now under consideration, shall be plainly stated. I withhold my assent from the same, because I regard it as the culmination of a most barefaced, impudent, and shameless scheme to betray the interests of the people, and to worse than squander the public money . . ."

On June 19 the Common Council had awarded the contract to George Talbot over the figures of five lower bidders. The injustice of this action drew strong condemnation from the press. The *Buffalo Express* declared that "the oldest citizen never saw a bolder or more unblushing piece of rascality than yesterday's award of the street-cleaning contract."

When the Council met on June 26, 1882, it set aside the Talbot contract by a vote of twenty-three to two. This action, however, did not detract from the effectiveness of the mayor's message vetoing the award some days before. The street-cleaning contract finally went to the lowest bidder, Thomas Maytham.

The concern Cleveland had shown for the people of Buffalo was noted by many. Here and there throughout New York State men of influence began to think seriously about the future of Buffalo's "Veto Mayor." As early as June his name had been suggested for nomination to the governorship. By October, a Cleveland boom was well underway. That same month the state convention at Syracuse chose him as the Democratic standard-bearer. On November 7, 1882, the voters of New York State swept him into office with a landslide vote.

When the Common Council of Buffalo met on November 20, 1882, no veto message awaited their attention. Instead, they received a communication from the governor-elect informing them that: "I have expended for postage and other incidental expenses connected with

the Mayor's office the sum of twenty-five dollars and twenty-four cents." He requested repayment of this sum. Then came the anticipated letter of resignation. Grover Cleveland's resignation was accepted and the Council then selected one of its members to serve as mayor until the next regular election.

At the time of his resignation, the local press praised Cleveland for his accomplishments and expressed the gratitude of the citizens for the services he had rendered. ". . . taking a higher view of his obligations and opportunities he began the difficult and often thankless work of the reformer." Cleveland's reward awaited him in Albany.

His triumph at the poll's in November 1882 was the result of two significant conditions. First, both major parties had been divided within themselves. Cleveland, therefore, could refrain from pledging his support to any particular group within these parties. He was not dependant on any political ring. Secondly, Cleveland's record as a reform mayor of Buffalo appealed strongly to a large number of voters who were disgusted with the corruption in New York State politics. The buying and selling of votes, the bribery of state senators and assemblymen, the granting of rebates to contractors hired by the state had been common in state government. These were the same conditions which had prevailed in Buffalo when Cleveland became mayor. Hence, many hoped that Cleveland might reform the state government in the same way he had the city government of Buffalo.

As Governor, Cleveland was still more concerned with honesty and efficiency in government than with pleasing those who controlled the Democratic party. The party had expected that many jobs which lay within the Governor's power to fill would be given to those who supported the party. Cleveland proceeded to fill important positions with men who were well qualified instead of with persons with powerful political connections. He named James Shanahan, an experienced professional engineer, as superintendent of public works instead of the man selected by the party bosses. In choosing a commissioner to take charge of the planning of the new capitol, he appointed Isaac G. Perry, an outstanding architect, rather than the party nominee.

Cleveland used the same weapon in fighting corruption which he had employed so successfully in Buffalo. Each bill passed by the Legislature was carefully examined. If it appeared to be in the least degree unconstitutional or not in the best interests of the people, the Governor vetoed it without regard for whatever powerful interests might be behind the bill.

Two of Cleveland's vetoes particularly enraged Tammany, the group of politicians in control of the Democratic party in New York City. One was the Five Cent Fare Bill which would have given the elevated railroad riders in New York a lower fare and had their support as well as the support of the city's papers. This bill Cleveland found to be unconstitutional and he refused to sign it. The second was a bill

for reorganizing the fire department of Buffalo. This was designed to provide many jobs for party supporters for patronage purposes. The whole Democratic organization in Buffalo was behind the measure. Cleveland rejected the bill with angry words. He believed that it would break up an efficient city department in order to create the possibility of patronage. The *Albany Evening Journal* congratulated Cleveland and commented: "... The Democracy of Erie is in one white-hot, hissing globule of rage . . . If (they) made a mistake last November, the people didn't. Grover Cleveland has shown himself what we took him on trust to be last fall — bigger and better than his party."

Socially, Cleveland was little changed. As a bachelor, he lived a fairly simple life, with one of his sisters, usually Mrs. Hoyt, acting as his hostess. He made few changes in the executive mansion which the State had bought about ten years before, except to install an office for Sunday and night work. He rose at seven, walked to the capitol after breakfast, walked home for lunch at twelve-thirty, returned to his office an hour later and worked to fulfill his duties as Governor until five. After dinner he usually worked on his papers until well after eleven. The *Albany Evening Journal* said of his routine: "Plainly, he is a man who is not taking enough exercise; he remains within doors constantly, eats and works, eats and works, and works and eats . . . There is not a night last week that he departed from the new capitol before one a.m. Such work is killing work." From time to time he did find time to read snatches of history and biography and to go fishing down the Hudson or in the Adirondacks with his assistant secretary, Col. William Gorham Rice.

By 1884, this conscientious, hard-working Governor of New York State had attracted national notice. Throughout the country, there were individuals who were interested in efficiency, honesty, and reform in government. They were thinking of Cleveland as the logical candidate of the Democratic party for the office of President of the United States. At the party convention in Chicago there was, at first, doubt that Cleveland could gain the support of his home state, as the Tammany leaders were bitterly opposed to him. As the delegates gathered, however, with their brass bands and their Cleveland banners gleaming silver and gold, the hopes of his friends grew. After a stormy session, Cleveland won the nomination as Democratic candidate with Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana as his running-mate.

In 1884, Cleveland was battling against James G. Blaine, a veteran Republican politician, in a dirty, bitter campaign. Supporters of both sides released explosive stories of scandals in the lives and actions of each of the opposing candidates. Cleveland was particularly hurt when even some Buffalo newspapers and ministers joined in the mud-slinging and accused him of immorality.

Despite the scandals, however, Cleveland received strong support among those who desired to see his reform policies carried into the

federal government. When he was nominated, a party of independent Republicans, the Mugwumps, rose up to support him with enthusiasm.

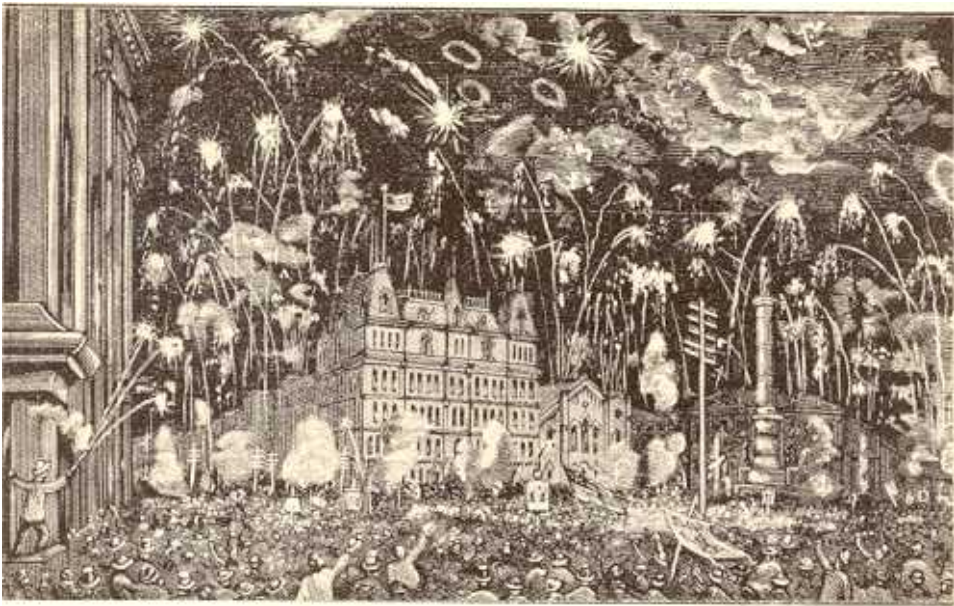
While Blaine set forth on a hard campaign that put him before hundreds of audiences, Cleveland stayed quietly at his desk in Albany, depending upon his friends and supporters to swing the election. Only twice did he leave on speaking trips. He journeyed to New Jersey and Connecticut, where he spoke on the need for civil service reform and tax reduction, and to Buffalo. Here, a tremendous reception awaited the former mayor. As he drew into the railway yards one October evening, bonfires and the whistling of locomotives signalled his arrival. Band units and a parade of 20,000 men with torches and lanterns, representing Democratic clubs from the whole of the Western New York area, gaily marched him through streets decorated with bunting, colored mottoes, Chinese lanterns, and illuminated portraits. When the noisy campaign concluded, Cleveland won, becoming the first Democratic President of the United States since the Civil War.

When Cleveland left Albany on March 4, 1885, to take up his duties in Washington, he went with a firm determination to work in the best interests of the nation. He was full of appreciation for the help he had received in the election campaign from some old friends such as "Shan" Bissell of Buffalo, his former partner. Yet he was heart-sore and bitter against what he called the "dirty and contemptible part of the Buffalo population" which had spread "filthy scandal" during the campaign. In a letter to Bissell he wrote: "I look upon the next four years to come as a cheerful self-inflicted penance for the good of my country. I can see no pleasure in it and no satisfaction, only a hope that I can be of service to my people . . ." He further revealed: ". . . I shall not come to Buffalo . . . as I feel at this moment I would never go there again if I could avoid it. Elected President of the United States, I feel that I have no home at my home. . . ."

In his new residence, the White House, Cleveland maintained a simple routine. His household consisted of his servant, William Sinclair, who had come with him from Albany, a French chef, a few house servants, but no personal attendants. His sister Rose, an attractive, educated woman, was his hostess. As he had done in Albany, Cleveland spent long hours at work. He would arrive in his executive office on the second floor before nine to busy himself with papers or meetings, interrupting them only for meals, official receptions, or an occasional walk to the Washington Monument.

Even before he took office, duties pressed upon him. In selecting his cabinet Cleveland faced a delicate task. As the first Democratic President in a generation, he was pressed by party groups in all areas of the country who wished their selected influential representatives to be included.

As Cleveland took over, the most troublesome problem was the civil service. Hordes of petty supporters clamored for jobs while thou-



*Joyous Demonstration in Lafayette Square celebrating Cleveland's Nomination.*

sands of reformers looked to the new President to justify their hopes of correcting patronage evils. At that time, about 110,000 government jobs were filled by persons appointed by the President, while only 16,000 were appointed through competitive examinations. In the past a great many had been appointed for whom there were no real jobs, as pay-off for political support. Cleveland was aware of the abuses which existed and determined to enforce the law as it then stood and also to see that inefficient employees were removed regardless of their political influence. To him, appointments were to be based solely on fitness for office.

Shortly after he took office he had to deal with the silver problem, which was becoming critical. Silver coinage had been authorized some time before and the government was receiving large quantities of silver in payment of debts to the government. On the other hand, the government had to pay out gold in payment of its debts. At the same time an established gold reserve had to be maintained as a guarantee for "greenbacks" — paper money. The amount of gold held by the Treasury had become reduced to a dangerous point where it might lessen the value of American money and credit. Despite pressures from the strongly Democratic Southwest, Cleveland took a firm stand on the question of limiting further silver coinage, and throughout his eight years in the White House he stubbornly defended the sound financial system recommended by eastern banking and business men.

While the press and public were concerned with the measures the new President was fostering and those he was already vetoing, an event occurred that was little noticed even by the Washington papers. Miss Frances Folsom and her mother were the guests of Miss Rose Cleveland at the White House during Frances' April vacation from



*Tammany — "Now, Grover, How about those Promises?"*

—after a cartoon in Judge by Victor Gilham.

bills were being passed in the House and Senate which awarded pensions and arrears payments to veterans whose claims had been turned down by the Pensions Bureau. Cleveland supported the view that Congress must either rely on the Bureau and accept its rulings or reorganize it to make it reliable. Claims should not be dealt with by private bills in Congress as this was a gross waste of the government's time. No previous President had ever refused to sign a bill awarding a veteran a pension. But Cleveland carefully looked at each of the hundreds of bills which Congress had so carelessly passed and by the middle of August had vetoed more than a hundred of them.

Then a new pension bill was introduced which would provide for an even more extravagant expenditure of public funds. By it, veterans of over 90 days service could claim a pension for any disability whatsoever, even old age or alcoholism. There was an uproar in the nation at large, although veterans' organizations strongly supported the bill. The bill passed both houses almost unanimously. With a scathing rebuke to Congress, Cleveland vetoed this bill, earning both friends and enemies.

Since the opening of the West, there had been a growing scandal regarding the granting of millions of acres of public lands. Railroads, cattle barons, lumber companies, surveyors with an eye on a quick dollar more than on their instruments, western politicians, all were sharing the spoils. Ranchers had riders fraudulently claiming homestead lands. Cattlemen were illegally fencing in large tracts of public land. Within 60 days after taking office Cleveland and his associates took steps to prevent further "land grabs." During 1885 alone, actions for recovery of lands prepared in the Interior Department totalled \$3,000,000.

The President's whole attention, however, was not centered on political questions. An exciting event occurred in the White House on

Wells College. This was the child of Cleveland's former partner whose guardianship had become Cleveland's responsibility several years before. Now grown to beautiful young womanhood, her regard for her father's friend continued to grow.

One of the problems which Cleveland had to solve was the result of a notorious pensions act which had been signed in 1879 by President Hayes. Supported by the votes of Civil War veterans and their relatives, this act was costing the government millions of dollars a year, much of it being paid out on fraudulent claims. By the hundreds,



the evening of June 2, 1886. Miss Frances Folsom and her mother, who had been travelling in Europe, returned to New York in late May. Immediately afterwards there was an announcement of Frances' engagement to President Grover Cleveland. The wedding was originally planned to take place in Folsomdale, near Buffalo, at the home of the bride's grandfather. However, his death caused the place of ceremony to be changed to the White House. On June 2, an army of florists transformed the Blue Room at the White House into a garden of roses and pansies, where Sousa's Marine Band was present to play the wedding march. At 6:30 in the evening the radiant young Frances Folsom became the bride of President Grover Cleveland in a simple ceremony performed by Reverend William N. Cleveland. Soon after nine o'clock the happy couple left by special train for the seclusion of Deer Park in western Maryland.

The President unfortunately had little time for an extended honeymoon. Pressing matters demanded his return to Washington. As Cleveland's four years in Washington drew to a close, one issue overshadowed all others in public discussion. In 1887 Cleveland asked Congress to pass a lower protective tariff measure, favored by the Democrats and opposed by the Republicans. Manufacturing interests saw it as a threat to their markets if taxes on imported goods were reduced. This became a significant issue in the presidential campaign of 1888.

In June of that year, both parties held their conventions. In Chicago the Republicans nominated Benjamin Harrison, who supported an out-and-out high protective tariff policy. In St. Louis, the Democrats quietly renominated Grover Cleveland, in spite of a lack of support from sections of the party in New York State.

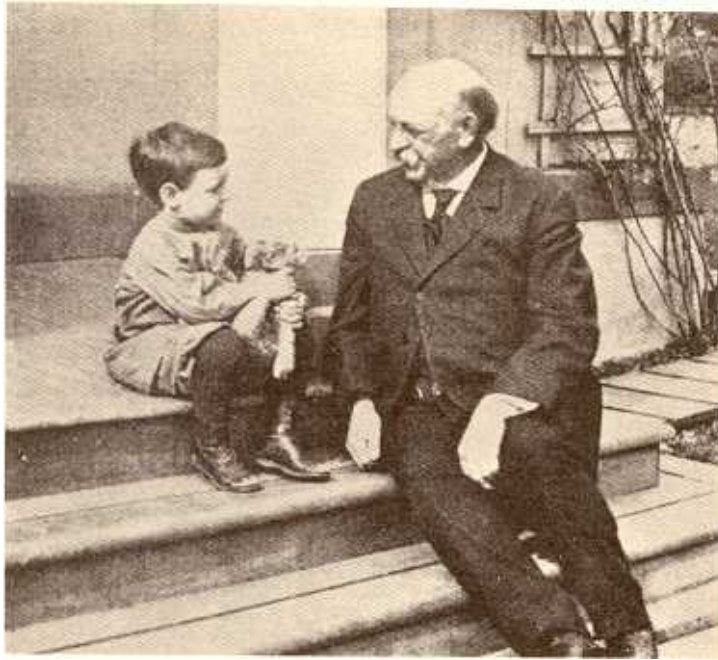


*The President's Wedding — from Harper's Weekly, June, 1886.*

During the months that followed, the Republicans, with a hard-driving, well-financed organization, were successful. Benjamin Harrison became President; Grover Cleveland returned to New York, where he took up practice as an attorney.

Four years later, in 1892, the same candidates were endorsed for the Presidency. Again one of the chief issues was the tariff. Cleveland, who had favored a lessening of the protective tariff and increasing taxes on such luxuries as liquor and tobacco, was elected. Unfortunately, Congress failed to pass the kind of tariff measure President Cleveland wanted. Cleveland's popularity in his second term suffered from the Panic of 1893. Since he opposed inflating the currency, many of those farmers and working people who suffered so much during the depression felt that Cleveland had sold out to the big-money interests.

In foreign affairs, Cleveland's second term was notable. Just before his inauguration a revolutionary movement, supported by wealthy American sugar interests and involving American Marines had deposed Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii. The new president, Sanford Dole, proposed annexation to the United States, and with undue haste the American flag was raised. Within days a treaty of annexation was presented to Congress by President Harrison. Immediately after his inauguration Cleveland recalled the treaty and appointed an investigation committee. Finding that the majority of the people of Hawaii did not favor annexation and believing that there had been inexcusable interference



*Cleveland in 1907 with his son.*

by Americans in Hawaiian affairs, Cleveland called upon Congress to maintain the rights of small nations and asked it to adopt a policy “. . . consistent with American honor, integrity, and morality.” His policy of courageous and unyielding opposition to imperialism set a pattern for the nation in placing national honor above motives of greed.

Later he again displayed great ability in foreign affairs when he took a strong stand in favor of the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine in the Venezuela boundary dispute. Great Britain, which owned the colony of British Guiana just east of Venezuela in South America, tried to establish a new border for the colony cutting deeper into Venezuelan territory. The United States felt this was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine for European nations were not to interfere in such a fashion in the affairs of the Americas. President Cleveland insisted that Great Britain have the dispute arbitrated. His firm stand gained new prestige for the United States among the nations of the world.

However, by 1896, when the next presidential election was fought not even a strong foreign policy could bring victory to the Democrats. A tired Cleveland turned over the office of President to the Republican victor, William McKinley.

Cleveland retired to the quiet village of Princeton, New Jersey, to enjoy life with his wife and children and to vacation at “Grey Gables” on Cape Cod. Here, in 1903, the youngest of his five children, Francis Folsom Cleveland, was born. It has been remarked that few fathers ever loved their children more than the plain, simple, and aging Cleveland. On his 70th birthday, old political feuds forgotten, there was an informal national celebration to honor the man whose compelling strength of character had made him a symbol of national integrity.



Grover Cleveland in his later years.  
— Photo by L. S. Strong, Buffalo.

Just once more he visited Buffalo, the scene of his early rise in politics. His old friend Bissell died in 1903 and Cleveland journeyed west for his funeral. Quietly, on the morning of June 24, 1908, , shortly after he celebrated his seventy-first birthday, Cleveland's own life ended. South American republics, remembering his support of Venezuela, lowered their flags to half-mast. President Roosevelt at his grave expressed the nation's sorrow at the passing of the man whose final words were: "I have tried hard to do right."

\* \* \* \* \*

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, De Alva S. *A Political History of the State of New York*. Vol. 3. New York, 1909.
- Armitage, Charles H. *Grover Cleveland As Buffalo Knew Him*. Buffalo, 1926.
- Bergh, Albert E., ed. *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland*. New York, 1909.
- Bissell, Wilson S. "Cleveland as a Lawyer." *McClure's Magazine*, April, 1909.
- Ellis, David M. *et al.* *A Short History of New York State*. Ithaca, 1957.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*. New York, 1948.
- Horton, John T. *History of Northwestern New York*. Vol. 1. *Old Erie, The Growth of an American Community*. New York, 1947.
- Lynch, Denis T. *Grover Cleveland, a Man Four-Square*. New York, c. 1932.
- McElroy, Robert. *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman, an Authorized Biography*. New York, 1923.
- Nevins, Allan. *Grover Cleveland: a Study in Courage*. New York, 1932.
- ....., ed. *Letters of Grover Cleveland, 1850-1908*. Boston and New York, 1933.
- Parker, George F. "Grover Cleveland's Career in Buffalo. 1855-1882," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 28, 1920.
- ..... *Recollections of Grover Cleveland*. New York, 1909.

EDITOR: Thelma M. Moore.

\* \*

IN MEMORY OF  
**GROVER CLEVELAND**  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES  
1885-1889 AND 1893-1897

---

A MEMBER OF THE BUFFALO  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY WHO WELL  
SERVED THIS COMMUNITY IN  
VARIOUS OFFICIAL POSITIONS.  
HE WAS MAYOR OF BUFFALO WHEN  
ELECTED GOVERNOR OF NEW YORK  
STATE, FROM WHICH OFFICE  
HE WAS CALLED TO BE  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE NATION.

---